



Issue 30 (2007)
July 20 – 26, 2007
Part 1: News Analysis

Talks with neighbouring Azerbaijan this week failed to produce an agreement on demarcation of the Caspian Sea bed. Deputy Foreign Minister Halaf Halafov visited Ashgabat, hoping to secure the agreement needed for a Trans-Caspian pipeline to go forward. Nevertheless, the momentum for dialogue is promising after the 6-year hiatus during which diplomatic relations had been severed. Renewed negotiations are scheduled for September regarding proposed joint exploitation on a parity basis of the disputed Kyapaz/Serdar oil field, estimated to hold 80 million tons of oil and 32 bcm of gas, claimed for the past decade by both countries. Complicating relations are Turkmenistan's claim that Azerbaijan incurred debt for past gas deliveries. Turkmenistan sent representatives to Baku for talks, but reportedly declined the compromises offered.

Russian analysis of last week's deal with China has once again raised questions about Turkmenistan's actual energy reserves and its capacity to deliver on its pledges. The deal originated as an agreement in principle in 2006 for construction of a pipeline in 2009 to begin deliveries ultimately reaching 30 million cm per year. Some details on the production-sharing agreement (PSA) are still being ironed out, but the sides reached agreement on enabling exploitation of gas fields near the border of Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan is seeking \$100 per 1,000 cm, but the price is not yet set. China may try to bargain price concessions given its considerable investments throughout the Turkmen economy. Ashgabat's evasiveness may be a deliberate negotiating tactic to allow competition to drive prices up.

An enormously ambitious \$1 billion project to develop the Caspian Sea town of Turkmenbashi into a world-class resort and free economic zone drew a great deal of press coverage at home and abroad this week, especially as it was accompanied by news that Russia's Itera had also made an \$800-million deal to build a gas plant there. The project appears to be a way not only for Turkmenistan to expend anticipated gas revenues, but to attract foreign investment in the tourist complex itself as well as in Turkmenistan's economy in general. Some 40 companies were reported to be present at the launch ceremony, replete with a large sign about Turkmenistan's future lighting up the sky. Eager to appeal to the Turkmen president's taste for grandeur, some companies prepared mock-ups such as a Tower of Babel, a giant sailing ship, and the crown of Oguz Han, believed to be Turkmenistan's founder, to indicate the shapes for some of the 22 hotels set to be built in the resort area. Extensive demolition has leveled some residential areas in Turkmenbashi in recent years, ostensibly to make way for the new construction, but many residents have complained that they were not informed or duly compensated, and that some of the demolitions – which have razed parts of the Russian-style town – are ethnically discriminatory, according to local activists.

The government media spun the announcement this week that Turkmenistan has been elected vice-president of the UN General Assembly as a sign of international approval for the country's development. In fact, the election is largely ceremonial, shared with other countries, and the vote was not even noted on the UN's website. Likewise, while Turkmenistan portrayed a Turkmen delegation's visit to Washington as an auspicious occasion when audiences were impressed with the Turkmen president's reforms, the U.S. Trade Representative's website merely recounted regularly scheduled talks on trade and investment with all of Central Asia's representatives. Omitted from the news was the arrest of a third conscientious objector, who refused military service on religious grounds, underscoring the absence of provisions for alternative service in "neutral" Turkmenistan.

Part 2: News Digest

The digest of primary news and information sources from which this News Analysis is in part derived is available in the News Digest -- Part 2 of the *Turkmenistan Weekly News Brief* -- which is attached. This week's Digest includes the following:

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. Turkmen-Azeri Talks on Caspian Demarcation

Original title: Azeri-Turkmen Meeting on the Issue of Division of the Caspian in Ashgabat. *Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Source: Day.az/07/20/2007

Full version: <http://www.day.az/news/politics/86450.html>

Synopsis: A delegation from Azerbaijan headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Halaf Halafov completed a one-day visit to Ashgabat for talks about demarcation of the Caspian Sea, but no announcement of any details was made, Day.az reported, citing the Embassy of Azerbaijan in Turkmenistan. Khoshgeldy Babaev, Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan, led the group of Turkmen officials that took part in the talks.

The two countries are hoping to reach agreement on the division of the Caspian Sea bed into national sectors so that plans for a Trans-Caspian pipeline can proceed. While in Ashgabat, Halafov held talks with other officials about prospects for cooperation in trade.

b. Turkmen Delegation Visits Baku for Debt Talks

Original title: Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan Discussing Latter's Debts. *Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Source: BBC Kazakhstan General Newsire/07/23/07

Synopsis: A Turkmen government delegation led by Tuvakmammet Japarov, Turkmenistan's First Deputy Minister of Economics and Finance, traveled to Baku July 19 for two days of talks on Azerbaijan's debt to Turkmenistan, BBC reported. Officials from the Turkmengaz state gas enterprise and the Turkmen Central Bank also took part.

Azerbaijan is in arrears for natural gas imported in 1993-1994, and disputes revolve around other trade in 1992-1993 as well. Gas totaling \$81 million was purchased by Azerbaijan from Turkmenistan from 1993-1994, but Turkmenistan alleges that \$60 million was never paid directly. Azerbaijan claims the amount due is only \$28 million, saying it paid the rest of the debt with consumer goods delivered from 1995-1998. Turkmenistan does not recognize the goods supplied as payment of arrears.

c. Senior USAID Official Visits Turkmenistan

Original title: Deputy Assistant Administrator for USAID Visits Turkmenistan

Source: U.S. Embassy-Ashgabat/07/23/27

Full version: <http://turkmenistan.usembassy.gov/pr07232007.html>

Deputy Assistant Administrator for USAID Drew Luten is visiting Turkmenistan July 22-28 as the head of a delegation discussing economic cooperation with Turkmenistan. The delegation's official schedule includes meetings with Deputy Foreign Minister Wepa Hajyev, Minister of Economy and Finance Hojamyrat Geldimyradov, Minister of Agriculture Esenmyrat Orazgeldiyev and with other government official of Turkmenistan. Mr. Luten will also travel to Dashoguz and Mary velayats to hold meetings with local authorities and monitor implementation of USAID projects in Turkmenistan.
[Passage omitted on past assignments.]

d. Turkmen President Receives Tajik Energy Minister

Original title: President of Turkmenistan Receives Minister of Energy and Industry of Republic of Turkmenistan. *Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Source: *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*/no. 182/07/25/07

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov received Sherali Gulov, Minister of Energy and Industry of Turkmenistan, in Ashgabat July 24, *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan* reported. Minister Gulov extended an invitation to President Berdymukhamedov to visit Dushanbe and meet with Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon. The two nations hope to expand contacts and cooperation, specifically in the area of transport and establishment of an air corridor.

The Turkmen leader thanked the minister for taking part in recent forums on scientists and thinkers of the East, and also indicated that Turkmen health care facilities could be made available for Tajik citizens. Tajik businessmen are also studying the possibilities of investment in the new free-trade zone in Turkmenbashi. The Turkmen president proposed the creation of a Turkmen-Tajik economic commission to discuss further cooperation.

e. Turkmenistan Elected Vice-President of UN General Assembly

Original title: *Turkmenistan Elected Vice-President of UN General Assembly. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Source: turkmenistan.ru/07/23/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=10633&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: Turkmenistan has been elected vice-president of the UN General Assembly, Vladimir Goryayev, Deputy Director of the UN Department of Political Affairs, announced during a meeting with President Berdymukhamedov, turkmenistan.ru reported. The annual election for president and vice-president takes place in five regional groups of the world.

Goryayev congratulated the president and indicated that Turkmenistan's neutrality was "an important factor of security and sustainable development" in Central Asia "and would serve the cause of peace and prosperity," turkmenistan.ru reported. He discussed further steps to be taken to open a regional center for preventative diplomacy initiated some years ago, to provide early warning of conflicts and settlement of disputes in Central Asia.

f. Turkmenistan Endorses Death Penalty Abolition at UN General Assembly

Original title: *Turkmenistan Endorses Call for Death Penalty Abolition. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Source: turkmenistan.ru/07/20/07

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=10613&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: Turkmenistan has signed a statement endorsed by 85 states at the UN General Assembly advocating abolition of the death penalty, turkmenistan.ru reported. The statement notes the world-wide trend to abolish the death penalty, the ineffectiveness of capital punishment as a deterrent, and the irreversibility of judicial mistakes when punishment involves the death penalty.

g. Turkmen Delegation in Washington for Central Asian Trade Talks

Original title: *Priorities for Cooperation Established at Meetings in Washington. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: [Turkmen Government website/turkmenistan.gov.tm/07/24/07](http://turkmenistan.gov.tm/07/24/07)

Full version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/rus/index.php?idr=5&id=070724a>

Synopsis: On assignment from President Berdymukhamedov, a delegation from Turkmenistan headed by H. Geldymuradov, Minister of Economy and Finance, took part in a meeting of the U.S. Central Asian Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) along with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan, the Turkmen government website reported.

Geldymuradov's speech on President Berdymukhamedov's reforms and changes was heard with great interest. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund also expressed interest to the reforms and indicated a readiness for effective cooperation, including in training specialists and developing the private sector. Also discussed was the proposal to convene the next TIFA conference in Ashgabat in 2008.

h. Turkmenistan Participates in Central Asian Trade, Investment Talks in U.S.

Original title: *United States, Central Asian Countries Hold Third TIFA Council Meeting*

Source: [Office of the U.S. Trade Representative/ustr.gov/07/17/07](http://ustr.gov/07/17/07). Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source:

http://www.ustr.gov/Document_Library/Press_Releases/2007/July/United_States_Central_Asian_countries_Hold_Third_TIFA_Council_Meeting.html

Synopsis: Ambassador John K. Veroneau, Deputy United States Trade Representative, hosted the third annual meeting of the United States-Central Asian Council on Trade and Investment on July 17, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative reported on its website. Hojamyrat Geldamyradov, Minister of Economy and Finance, Turkmenistan, was among Central Asian officials who participated in the meeting.

[Passage omitted on list of participants]

"Our talks were very productive and offered all participants new insights into the process of trade liberalization and economic integration in the region, and its significance for regional development," said Ambassador Veroneau.

The Council, established pursuant to the U.S. Central Asian Trade and Investment Framework Agreement ("TIFA"), provides a regular forum to address regional trade issues that hamper intra-regional trade and economic development and can act as impediments to investment. Under the terms of the TIFA, the Council facilitates an ongoing dialogue in order to help increase commercial and investment opportunities by identifying and working to remove impediments to trade and investment flows between the United States and Central Asia. Topics covered at this year's Council meeting included a range of trade and investment issues such as barriers to doing business, trade liberalization and the WTO, and protection of intellectual property rights.

The United States has signed TIFAs with a number of countries in order to enhance trade ties and coordinate regionally and multilaterally through regular senior level discussions on trade and economic issues. In 2006, U.S. imports from the five Central Asian TIFA partner countries totaled about \$1.3 billion and exports totaled about \$927 million.

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. Another Conscientious Objector Jailed in Turkmenistan

Original title: *Urgent Action: TURKMENISTAN. Bayram Ashirgeldiev (m), aged 20, Nuryagdy Gairov (m), aged 27, New name: Aleksandr Zuev (m), aged 27.*

Source: *Amnesty International/07/23/07*

Nuryagdy Gairov has been sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment, Amnesty International reported. Bayram Ashirgeldiev and another Jehovah's Witness, Aleksandr Zuev, have received two-year suspended sentences. The men were punished for refusing on religious grounds to serve in the army. Amnesty International considers Nuryagdy Gairov to be a prisoner of conscience. He was reportedly sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment on 18 July at a closed trial at Kopetdag district court in the capital, Ashgabat, for "evasion of the draft to military service." According to Jehovah's Witness sources, he did not have a lawyer and his family had not been informed of the trial. He was arrested on 14 June and was reportedly held incommunicado for over a month. His mother died on the night of 17 July, and shortly afterwards he received his first visitor, another Jehovah's Witness, who had been summoned by the police and asked to see Nuryagdy Gairov and tell him that his mother had died.

Bayram Ashirgeldiev received a two-year suspended sentence on 20 July from Kopetdag district court. His parents were reportedly not allowed to visit him in detention. Relatives told Forum 18, a web-based news service working on religious freedom issues: "The judge told Bayram after the trial that, in two years' time, he will again be called up. If he then refuses, he will then face three to five years in prison." They added that "Bayram ... is very thin, pale and weak after 35 days in isolation cell. It's as though he's just emerged from a concentration camp." Aleksandr Zuev was charged on 28 June with "evasion of call-up to military service". On 18 July he was given a two-year suspended sentence by Azatlyk district court.

This is not the first time Nuryagdy Gairov and Aleksandr Zuev have been punished for refusing to perform military service on conscientious grounds. Nuryagdy Gairov was detained for one year in 1999-2000 and Aleksandr Zuev for 18 months in 2000-2001.

[Passages omitted: On definition of conscientious objector and recommended actions].

b. OSCE Centre Helps Organize Ecology Summer Camp in Turkmenistan

Original title: OSCE Centre Helps Organize Ecology Summer Camp in Turkmenistan..

Source: OSCE/07/25/07

Full version: <http://www.osce.org/item/25755.html>

Synopsis: Environmental protection and education were the focus of a summer camp and a summer school that ended in the city of Khazar on the Caspian Sea July 25, OSCE reported on its website. More than 60 school children, including orphans and disabled children, took part in the ten-day events organized by the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat and the city authorities.

"The summer camp and school helped children improve their knowledge of the environment, and understand the importance of teamwork for nature protection," said Gaurav Thapan-Raina, the OSCE Centre's Economic and Environmental Officer. "We were pleased to see the suntanned happy faces of children who also improved their health through physical activities."

Children attended classes on "Nature reserves of Turkmenistan" in the city library, visited a dendrarium and potential eco-tourism sites. They also took part in thematic debates, contests and quizzes on preserving and better understanding nature. The OSCE Centre in Ashgabat supports a variety of camps and youth development projects throughout the year.

c. Women Increasingly Turn to Drug Trade in Turkmenistan

Original title: Drug Addiction and the Foundations of Society. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Source: Turkmen Institute for Human Rights/07/24/07

Full version: <http://www.chrono-tm.org/?0251043190000000000000011000000>

Synopsis: The first president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, was widely reported to have been relatively lenient on drug-trafficking and thereby helped bring about the current drug crisis, the Turkmen Institute for Human Rights (TIHR) reported on its website. Niyazov permitted law enforcement officials to overlook small amounts of drugs, and appeared to consider opium use as virtually an ancestral tradition. He was known to berate his bureaucrats for their drug addiction, but there was no national program to curb drug abuse. Under Niyazov, unemployment, poverty, and the degradation of the educational system conspired to create a favorable climate for rampant drug use. A lawyer cited in the article says that the women's prison colonies are now filling up with female prisoners, virtually unknown 15 years ago, many convicted of drug-related offenses.

Women are turning more to the narcotics trade to survive under desperate economic conditions. One woman who took to drug-dealing after the loss of her own and her husband's jobs said, "I understood that the drugs I was delivering would destroy somebody's son or daughter, husband or father. But in the balance hung the welfare of my own children, and I got into the drug business." Although at one time her family prospered and was able to buy extras and pay a bribe to release her eldest son from the draft, in the end he became an addict, her daughter became a sex-worker, and she herself was jailed. A visit to the cemetery by a TIHR observer shows more young people dying at an early age, 20-35 years, and mainly young men. The author recounts the death of a neighbor's son, and the actual relief such deaths bring to families plagued by violent, drug-addicted relatives.

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

a. Government Plans Free Economic Zone for Turkmenbashi Resort

Original title: Ashgabat Says It Will Invest \$1 Bln in Caspian Sea Resort. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: The Moscow Times/Associated Press/07/24/07

Full version: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2007/07/24/048.html>

Synopsis: At a ceremony on July 22 attended by 40 foreign companies, President Berdymukhamedov unveiled plans to spend US\$1 billion and seek additional foreign investment for a Caspian tourist resort area 700 kilometers from Ashgabat, AP reported. The government said the area will be Turkmenistan's first free

economic zone and is intended to attract investment for building tourism infrastructure and general economic development of the port.

Turkmenbashi, until 1993 named Krasnovodsk before being renamed in honor of Turkmenistan's first president, who used the title "Turkmenbashi" (Father of Turkmen), is the site of Turkmenistan's largest oil refinery. The resort is to have 60 hotels and restaurants, a 3,000-seat stadium, sports facilities, and shopping centers.

b. Turkish Construction Already Begun for \$1 Billion Caspian Resort

Original title: Turkmenistan Starts Tourist Drive. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: BBC Central Asian News/07/23/07

Full version: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6911661.stm>

Synopsis: Several Turkish construction companies have begun building new hotels and spas in a planned free-economic zone, BBC Central Asia News reported. President Berdymukhamedov announced the \$1 billion investment plan at a ceremony at the site, with the slogan "A new era, a new Turkmenistan" as a backdrop lighting up the sky. In the past, foreign tourists had been discouraged from visiting Turkmenistan, and only then with government minders.

c. Foreign Companies Show Hotel Models of Tower of Babel, Crown of Oguz Han

Original title: Tower of Babel, Sailing Ship and Crown of Oguz Han to be Erected in Avaza. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: [turkmenistan.ru/07/23/07](http://www.turkmenistan.ru/07/23/07)

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=10628&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: After the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new free-enterprise zone and resort complex in Turkmenbashi July 21, foreign companies presented models of 22 hotels to President Berdymukhamedov to be considered for construction in the area, which is to be called "Avaza", [turkmenistan.ru](http://www.turkmenistan.ru) reported. Among these were mock-ups for a hotel for 200 guests shaped as the biblical Tower of Babel; a hotel for 600 with a business center modeled as a sailing ship; and a hotel for 280 designed as the crown of Oguz Han, forefather of the Turkmen nation. Also demonstrated were models of two 18-storey hotels with restaurants and two 20-storey twin tower facilities.

d. Turkmenistan Plans to Ease Visas for Foreigners in Free Economic Zone

Original title: Turkmenistan Creates a Free Economic Zone in Hope of Attracting Greater Foreign Investment. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Global Insight/07/24/07

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov announced that Turkmenistan is allocating \$1 billion for a 10-mile Caspian Sea coast area near Turkmenbashi, Global Insight reported. The president added that Turkmenistan will simplify the visa regime for tourists and foreign specialists and provide a list of tax and other privileges for investors, including freedom from customs fees for imports due for construction and exploitation of the area, licenses, and rent for land.

The Turkmen leader also announced the completion of an \$800-million deal with the Russian gas producer Itera to construct a plant in Turkmenbashi.

e. Turkmengaz to Spend \$12.4 Million for Pipes, 1.5 Million Euro of Chemicals

Original title: Turkmengaz to Buy \$12.4 Million Worth of Pipes. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Source: Interfax News Agency/07/10/07

Synopsis: Turkmengaz, the Turkmenistan state company, is to sign a contract with a number of foreign companies to buy \$12.4 million worth of pipes to drill wells, the presidential press service told Interfax.

An additional 1.5 million euros are to be spent on purchase of chemicals for the oil treatment process. The companies involved are Clariant Export AG of Switzerland which plans to sign contracts worth 853,400 euros; Champion Technologies Europe BV of the Netherlands for 688,500 euros; and Bincer Holding Corporation (Seychelles) for \$370,000.

f. Implications of Turkmenistan-China Gas Main for Russia's Gazprom

Original title: *Gas for the Whole World: Turkmenistan Promises to Supply Gas to the Whole World. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Source: *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*/07/16/07

Full version: http://www.ng.ru/cis/2007-07-16/7_gaz.html

Synopsis: Russian commentator Viktoriya Panfilova notes that the agreement signed with China last week for 30 years to ship 30 bcm of gas annually was actually originally signed in April 2006, and involves a pipeline to begun operation only in 2009, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* reports. Details still remain to be worked out, and there is "ambiguous wording" in the document, she says. Sokhrat Kadyrov, a scholar at the Norwegian Foreign Policy Institute says he is "confused" by wording that says if gas from the fields of the right bank of the Amurdarya River are insufficient, Turkmenistan will provide the fuel "from other sources"; this could mean shortages for Gazprom, he believes. Promises made to Afghanistan for gas deliveries provoke further questions about the capacity of Turkmenistan's reserves.

The price of the gas to be pumped to China is not agreed yet. Turkmenistan has indicated \$100 per 1,000 cmm but this may not meet with China's approval, especially given that China itself will be laying the pipeline. China may try to bargain price concessions, says Panfilova, based on its substantial investments in various branches of the Turkmen economy. Ashgabat may be deliberately ambiguous so as to obtain the maximum benefit for itself from competing projects from China and Russia. Turkmenistan claims to have 30 trillion cubic meters of gas, but no outside expert has been able to confirm this. In the Soviet era, Turkmen gas was forecast at 3 trillion cm.

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